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AUTHOR Hill, Marie Somers; Casteel, DiAnn
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ABSTRACT

The Tennessee education system has slowly introduced school-based management (SBM) or site based decision making (SBDM). This paper presents findings of a study that investigated Tennessee educators' perceptions of responsibility for teacher hiring. Data were obtained from a survey of 197 teachers, 22 principals, 13 district administrators, and 22 other educators in northeastern Tennessee. Fifty-one percent said that the school district should have responsibility for teacher hiring, and 25 percent and 24 percent gave responsibility to the principal and to a collaborative process, respectively. Teachers and administrators did not differ in their perceptions of who should have decision-making responsibility during the four phases of the hiring process. Teachers, parents, and district administrators said that the school district should handle clerical duties, the training of interviewers, salary negotiation, advertisement of job vacancies, and the review of applicants. All three groups said that collaborative efforts should involve developing interview questions, conducting interviews, and selecting the candidates. The findings point to school-level personnel's discomfort for SBM decision making. Five tables are included. The appendix contains a copy of the questionnaire. (Contains 9 references.) (LMI)

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PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISION MAKING:

HIRING A TEACHER

Marie Somers Hill
East Tennessee State University
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
P. O. Box 70550
Johnson City, TN 37614

DiAnn Casteel
Doak Elementary School
Greeneville, TN 37743

In the midst of talk, action, and changing policy surrounding school reform, a variety of initiatives have emerged known as site based decision making (SBDM) or school-based management (SBM). SBDM is a form of decentralization. The individual school is identified as the primary unit of improvement with redistribution of decision making authority as the catalyst to stimulate and sustain improvements (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). SBDM seeks to "empower school staff by providing authority, flexibility, and resources to solve the educational problems particular to their school." (David, 1989, 52). Over the past decade, federal, state, and local educational departments and boards have relinquished control to an array of configurations of school-based governance. SBDM has extended participation in decision making with actions being based on the unique needs of an individual school and its community (O'Neil, 1994).

Because of its individuality, SBDM is translated into decision making frameworks attempting to fit each setting. For instance in Miami, principals have ultimate responsibility for school governance with a council's assistance. Decision making extends within this model to complete control over the school's budget. Success in Miami spread to the entire state through a 1991 legislative mandate that faculty and parents within every school must develop a comprehensive school improvement plan (Hallifax, 1994). The format of Chicago's SBM demonstrates a range of structures along a continuum with various proportions of control allocated between the council, faculty, parents, and principals (O'Neil, 1994).

Most SBM councils begin work on "managerial" issues such as school appearance, schedules, and calendars. Some councils advance to second-order change involving instruction. At each juncture, turf issues and traditional control become altered. Responsibilities realign.

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Traditional Decision Making in Regard to Teacher Hiring

Specific responsibility for hiring a teacher traditionally rested with either the principal or school district. Today many principals routinely involve other teachers in the interview and selection of new teachers for the school. Occasionally parents are part of the hiring process.

School districts, when responsible, usually act as screening agencies verifying credentials and checking records and references. Some districts form representative committees to reduce large numbers of candidates for teaching positions to a pool from which selections for particular schools can be made.

Hiring teachers and other personnel has also had a negative history in some school districts. Hiring became an outlet for political payback with elected school board members and/or superintendents exerting total control over hiring practice. The superintendent's cousin or relatives of campaign contributors filled teaching vacancies regardless of their ability, experience, or credentialling.

Where SBDM exists, changes have occurred. For instance, Kentucky's legislatively mandated that SBDM councils share governance functions in 16 areas including principal selection and consultation with the principal to fill teaching vacancies (Van Meter, 1994).

Even though Tennessee is geographically adjacent to Kentucky, SBDM has evolved more slowly. Some districts, largely due to action and encouragement from individual superintendents, have disbursed district control. Legislative reform has encouraged several initiatives, one of which is SBDM.

Purpose of the Study

Because of these changes, educators' perceptions regarding where decision making would most appropriately reside on one instructional issue were important to study. Within the middle of massive shuffling of educational control, where do school personnel perceive responsibility rests in regard to the critically important task of hiring a teacher?

Sample

Educators from the northeastern region of Tennessee were surveyed to determine their perceptions of where responsibilities should best reside for a variety of steps in hiring a teacher.

The sample consisted of the entire population of educators from a city and county district to include 197 teachers, 22 principals, 13 district administrators, and 22 educators representing positions with a mixture of teaching and administrative responsibilities such as vocational directors and media specialists.

Instrument

The instrument, Decision Making: Hiring a Teacher, (Appendix A) was formulated to review the major steps involved with hiring a teacher. Respondents selected the individual or group they felt would most appropriately be responsible by placing a D for district, P for principal, or C for a school committee of parents, teachers, and community members. Combinations of D, P, or C for

various steps were possible. At the bottom of the instrument, space was available to add comments, suggestions, or opinions about the topic.

Eighteen steps in the hiring process are listed beginning with the initial decision of filling and advertising a vacancy through the actual selection of a teacher. After the steps were compiled, three human resource directors reviewed the steps and concurred that the list was comprehensive, accurate, and basically sequential.

Impetus for the study emerged from an exercise devised for a doctoral cohort composed of 20 principals and district office personnel in a course exploring change, planning, and decision making. The survey instrument was eventually piloted with the cohort. Feedback from the pilot group resulted in rewording the directions. The instrument was then revised into final form.

Procedures

Information collected represents nominal data. Therefore, the chi-square statistic for enumerative data was utilized. Additional evaluations were conducted and results were analyzed to determine the relevant significance of the data. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS/PC+.

Findings

Research Question 1: Who do educators perceive should be responsible for hiring a teacher?

When all 18 steps involved in the hiring process were combined and perceptions of educators were considered as one large group, a slight majority (50.74%) of the respondents felt that the district should have decision making responsibility for the overall process of hiring a teacher. The other half of the responses were fairly evenly split between primary responsibility for overall hiring processes resting with the principal (25.18%) or with the process being collaborative (24.08%). As educators are considered in subgroups of teachers and administrators, perceptions change only slightly. Detailed results are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Overall Preference for Responsibility in Hiring a Teacher Based on Educational Position

	DISTRICT	PRINCIPAL	COMMITTEE	COMBINATION
TEACHER PREFERENCE n=197	51.67%	25.27%	12.59%	10.47%
PRINCIPAL PREFERENCE n=22	52.02%	24.75%	15.91%	7.32%

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR PREFERENCE n=13	57.07%	22.22%	12.63%	8.08%
PREFERENCE OF OTHERS n=22	45.71%	31.43%	11.43%	11.43%
Averages	50.74%	25.18%	14.40%	9.68%

Research Question 2: Are there any differences between teachers and administrators in their perceptions of where decision making should reside for various steps required in hiring a teacher?

The chi square statistic was used to determine any differences in perceptions between administrators and teachers in regard to the placement of decision making in hiring a teacher. The eighteen steps in the process for hiring a teacher were divided into four phases. The first four questions encompass the Vacancy Phase involving the decision to hire and advertise the position. During the Application Phase, the paperwork involving forms, documentation, acknowledgement, and narrowing the candidates to those who will be interviewed is facilitated. Actually interviewing and picking the candidate make up the Selection Phase. Finally notifying successful or unsuccessful candidates and negotiating salary and benefits create the final Follow Through Phase.

No significant differences in any phase were found between the teachers and the administrative group formed by combining responses from district administrators, superintendents, and principals. Table 2 reflects findings for this question.

Table 2

Test of Independence of Selection by Teachers and Administrators of Phases in the Hiring Process

		χ^2	(df)	p
VACANCY PHASE	(Q1-Q4)	1.09	(3)	.77
APPLICATION PHASE	(Q5-Q9)	1.09	(3)	.77
SELECTION PHASE	(Q10-Q15)	1.78	(4)	.77
FOLLOW THROUGH PHASE	(Q16-Q18)	3.42	(4)	.48

Research Question 3: Do educators perceive that different groups should be responsible for different steps in the process of hiring a teacher?

The actual frequency of selection for each of the 18 steps in hiring a teacher follow. Table 3 records responses of teachers, Table 4 principals' responses, and Table 5 district administrators' responses.

Similar perceptions are apparent for all three groups. The three groups feel that the district should still handle clerical duties involved with the hiring process such as designing application procedures, checking credentials, and acknowledging completed applications. Perceptions favoring district office involvement during the Vacancy and Application Phases were quite strong. In later phases, educators felt that the district should be responsible for training interviewers and negotiating salaries.

When combining the committee and combination of stakeholders categories, all three groups held the same top three priorities for collaborative efforts including developing interview questions, interviewing, and selecting the candidate.

When divided into subgroups, these numbers are small and should be viewed with caution. Nevertheless, one difference of opinion seemed plausible when reviewing the strength of the support for a collaborative effort compared to district power. Principals and teachers felt that developing interview questions and protocol, conducting the actual interview, and selecting the candidate were best handled as a collaborative effort. District administrators, on the other hand, agreed to the point of selection. A slight edge (7 to 5) fell to favoring the district actually making the selection of the teacher.

Preferences can be seen in Table 3 through Table 5 that follow.

Table 3

Teachers' Frequency of Selection of Decision Making Responsibility Regarding Steps in the Process of Hiring a Teacher n = 197

QUESTION	DISTRICT	PRINCIPAL	COMMITTEE	COMBINATION
Initial decision to hire	107	38	35	17
Advertise vacancy	171	22	0	4
Formulate job description	52	95	30	20

Establish candidate credentials	126	29	17	25
Design application form	152	9	24	11
Decide steps and timelines in application process	153	7	23	11
Acknowledge completed application	140	47	8	2
Decide number to be interviewed	59	81	27	30
Select"short" list	50	75	39	33
Establish interview appointment	56	115	12	14
Select interviewers	79	47	39	32
Train interviewers	140	22	22	9
Select interview form and questions	73	34	55	34
Interview candidates	21	67	44	65
Select the candidate	78	26	48	44
Notify the selected candidate	81	105	5	6
Negotiate salary, etc.	166	9	13	8
Notify unsuccessful candidate	122	65	4	5
Totals	1826	893	445	370

Table 4

Principals' Frequency of Selection of Decision Making Responsibility Regarding Steps in the Process of Hiring a Teacher n = 22

QUESTION	DISTRICT	PRINCIPAL	COMMITTEE	COMBINATION
Initial decision to hire	11	2	8	1
Advertise vacancy	20	2	0	0
Formulate job description	7	9	4	2
Establish candidate credential	15	3	2	2
Design application form	19	1	1	1
Decide steps and timelines in application process	21	0	1	0
Acknowledge completed application	18	3	1	0
Decide number to be interview	4	9	6	3
Select "short" list	6	7	6	3
Establish interview appointment	9	13	0	0
Select interviewers	6	8	6	2
Train interviewers	19	1	1	1
Select interview form and questions	3	5	10	4
Interview candidates	1	5	9	7

Select the candidate	5	8	6	3
Notify the selected candidate	9	11	2	0
Negotiate salary, etc.	19	3	0	0
Notify unsuccessful candidates	14	8	0	0
Totals	206	98	63	29

Table 5

District Administrators' Frequency of Selection of Decision Making Responsibility Regarding Steps in the Process of Hiring a Teacher
n = 13

QUESTION	DISTRICT	PRINCIPAL	COMMITTEE	COMBINATION
Initial decision to hire	8	2	3	0
Advertise vacancy	13	0	0	0
Formulate job description	5	6	1	1
Establish candidate credentials	8	3	1	1
Design application form	11	0	1	1
Decide steps and timelines in application process	10	2	0	1
Acknowledge completed application	11	1	1	0
Decide number to be interviewed	4	7	1	1
Select "short" list	3	6	2	2

Establish interview appointments	6	4	2	1
Select interviewers	4	3	3	3
Train interviewers	13	0	0	0
Select interview form and questions	5	1	5	2
Interview candidates	0	3	5	5
Select the candidate	7	1	4	1
Notify the selected candidate	3	8	1	1
Negotiate salary, etc.	12	0	1	0
Notify unsuccessful candidates	7	5	1	0
Totals	130	52	32	20

Additional Input

Finally, an open ended statement provided space at the end of the survey for respondents to include any opinion they wished to offer about this topic. A total of thirty-three opinions were given with several comments highly favoring (12) or opposing (8) community and parental involvement in decision making. When considering the extensive research support (Jennings, 1992; Henderson, 1988; Henderson, 1987), even stronger desire to involve parents and community representation in most school matters seems desirable.

Other open ended opinions were noted over a range of topics. Three people expressed confusion regarding the term district. Several opinions outlined a variety of conceptions of the best composition of a school committee. Six respondents voiced strong comments supporting hiring the **best** candidate regardless of the process. As one person wrote, SBM "will work beautifully when there is peace and unity among the entire school community. When everyone truly cares about children rather than papers and <u>power</u>!"

Conclusions

As with any change, mandates reorganizing and decentralizing decision making produce discomfort. Teachers in northeast Tennessee indicated a narrow focus of interest in being part of the decision making process. As would be true in most regions of the country, resistance to leadership dimensions stems from a wide range of factors including: (1) general atavistic tendencies when the organizational culture shifts, (2) preference for teaching rather than administrative tasks, (3) unease with additional responsibility due to a lack of preparation and training, (4) difficulty with assuming expanded duties without release time, and, especially in some districts, (5) desire to remain apolitical.

The greatest discomfort with the change in decision making responsibility seems to center at the district level. Valesky, Forsythe, and Hall (1992) in a study of principal perceptions of SBDM in Tennessee found that school councils had responsibility for curricular decisions but that districts were less willing to relinquish authority in the area of personnel and budgeting. Control issues, uncertainty in empowering others, and fear of the future of one's job makes their discomfort understandable. As with so many other issues, the most effective factor in reducing the discomfort and facilitating the positive aspects of the change process rest with local district leadership.

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APPENDIX A

DECISION MAKING: HIRING A TEACHER

Hiring a teacher involves many steps. Educators hold a variety of opinions about where responsibilities rest for each step in the hiring process. Please indicate who should be responsible for these steps by placing a D for district, P for principal, or C for a school committee composed of parents, teachers, and community members in the blanks to the left.

Who should be responsible to . . .

_____ make the initial decisions on whether to staff a teaching vacancy, save the funds, or spend funds in other ways?

_____ advertise that a teaching vacancy exists?

_____ formulate a job description for the position?

_____ decide basic candidate credential requirements?

_____ design an application form?

_____ design an application process involving decisions about to whom is the form sent, what initial credentialling documentation is required, and deadline for application?

_____ acknowledge that the application is received and is or is not complete?

_____ decide on the number of candidates on the "short" list to be interviewed?

_____ narrow the list of eligible candidates to the designated number?

_____ contact "short" list to arrange an appointment time for an interview?

_____ decide on the person or persons to conduct the interview?

_____ train person or persons in proper interview "etiquette" and objective interview techniques?

_____ decide on an interview form and sets of questions?

_____ interview candidates?

_____ design a procedure to decide on the candidate?

_____ notify the candidate that is selected?

_____ negotiate salary, starting date, benefits, etc?

_____ notify candidates not selected that the vacancy is filled?

Please place a check to designate your present position.

_____ principal _____ superintendent ____ district administrator

_____ teacher _____ other, specify _____

Please feel free to add any comments, suggestions, or opinions about this topic.